

Jean Waltz

Testimony to the Task Force on the Implementation of the Pupil Weighting Factors Report  
Public Hearing – September 9, 2021

Task Force Members,

Many thanks for your service. Unfortunately I wasn't able to get through my statement in the 3 minutes allotted. Please read my full testimony below, knowing if I didn't get choked up I probably would've gotten through it.

Hi, my name is Jeannie Waltz. Thanks so much for this opportunity to speak. I serve on Burlington's school board representing the Old North End. The most densely populated neighborhood in Vermont's most populated city, which is also known for its economic and racial diversity, per capita in New England.

What this actually looks like can be gleaned within minutes while hanging out on my porch, seeing people representing all "demographics" coming and going. What this actually feels like can be summarized as inviting and inspiring...but it's hard to put into words the emotions that go along with the sense of acceptance this community exudes.

I'm trying to paint a picture for you knowing the Old North End is an extreme exception compared to what most neighborhoods look and feel like in VT. Being that VT is the second whitest state--only a mere .2 percent behind Maine, I want to point out the resident makeup of my neighborhood is actually the norm in our country.

But Vermonters have embraced a narrative of having a progressive mindset, living in a forward thinking state without realizing how narrow their view is and while sending their children out into the world culturally stunted.

The majority of Vermonters are unable to see the prevalence of classism and racism. Or maybe they choose to look away. But there's no denying Vermont is not a progressive, nor forward thinking place to live for people of color.

I hope you care about that.

The reason legislators commissioned the study is because data shows our financially stable white students thrive in our schools disproportionately well compared to students living in poverty and/or living in a rural area BUT especially if the student is simply NOT white.

When I first read the study I felt such a sense of affirmation. Finally, data that pertained to the achievement gap but more so a real identifier of a system that's supporting the polarization of the "have and the have nots."

*Because it's in that space between the have and the have nots where bias is born and concepts of prejudice and racism are learned.*

I'm here to tell you to stop looking away. In your hands is an opportunity to make a system change that will provide all our children with a more equitable experience that will surely influence a trajectory in cultivating their mindset. (This is where my time was up) Just imagine in 20 years your decision reshaping a more just Vermont through their adult eyes.

Though the spirit behind Brigham is worthy of bragging rights, we need to acknowledge it was passed within a homogeneous state and consequent state of mind, unprepared to fathom educating students of the 21st century.

In this process you've avoided calling the current formula an example of systemic racism but I have to point out, entertaining categorical aid comes from appeasing the districts who've grown accustomed to ample funding. You're in the midst of troubleshooting how to coddle constituents who have advantages at the expense of those going without. You are bowing to biased favoritism rather than data--This is another glaring example of a broken system furthering classism and racism.

It took way too long for us to get here today. You cannot waste this opportunity to correct this injustice.